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Crystal Lake Draft Environmental Assessment Comment Compilation

Compiled by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Comment period: December 7, 2007, through January 21, 2008

Note: *The comment period was extended two weeks past the original comment deadline of January 7, 2008, by public request.*

Written comment letters received: 198

Methodology

At the conclusion of the comment period, all comments were copied and the originals were filed. FWP staff then reviewed the copies of comments. Individual comments in each letter were then highlighted and logged into the comment matrix. Whenever possible, the original language of the commenter was maintained and entered into the matrix. Preferred alternatives were noted and recorded in the matrix as well. Once all comments in each letter were logged, the reviewing FWP employee initialed, dated, and filed the copied comment letter.

The matrix consists of categories of comments in relation to each alternative. Those categories are: *Social Impacts, Infrastructure/Access, Boating/Launch, Vegetation, Fishery, Wildlife, Natural Resource, Economic Issues, Management Concerns, and Other*. There was a positive and negative column under each alternative. In some cases the commenter did not specify an alternative, but rather referred in general to the east side/shore or west side/shore. In this case, a separate east and west side category was created and comments were recorded in the appropriate location. Any noteworthy circumstances were identified with an asterisk (*) followed by a number. A key is attached to the matrix detailing the meaning of each asterisk. All comments not pertaining to a specific alternative were recorded as general comments under the related impact. Once the matrix was complete and all comments were reviewed and logged, a summary/compilation of comments was created.

This report consists of a synopsis of the comment matrix and thus the comment letters. A summary of general support for each alternative is detailed at the beginning of each alternative heading. Within each proposed alternative, the ten categories of impacts, as listed above, are highlighted. Similar comments in each category were grouped according to the specific impact or issue. In the report, these were then generalized in the following type of statement: *Five commenters stated that this alternative would cause the least impact to wildlife*. If there were additional comments regarding a specific impact, those were stated in this report following the general statement. If no comments were received in relation to a category, then the category was not listed under the alternative.

Following the alternative synopsis, there is a general comments section. This consists of comments not related to any specific alternative. These comments are organized under the same categories used for each alternative. These comments are taken directly from comment letters and are not paraphrased or generalized in any way.

Comment Compilation by Alternative

There was one commenter that selected the “preferred alternative” as their first choice stating, “It is the best and would benefit the public the most.” The commenter did not state exactly which alternative this was, and since the EA does not identify a preferred alternative, this alternative and comment cannot be applied to any alternative in the report below.

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There were 32 respondents that stated support for a public access in general.

- Two of these represented local clubs.
- One respondent states that the public owns the water and that the public access is there. This respondent continued by stating that “with proper sanitation (SSTs) and a garbage can, it will be much better for the residents around the lake than it is now. Please don't shut me out!”

Alternative A: No Action.

There were eight comments stating that their first choice was Alternative A.

- One commenter stated that the previous access was on private property, not state land, and therefore there is no precedent for public access on Crystal Lake.

FWP – Crystal Lake has historically had reliable public access through a variety of private ownerships. Public land ownership is not a prerequisite for public access.

Social Impacts:

- One respondent commented that not providing public access to Crystal Lake would be unfair to all who like to use it.

FWP – The agency concurs with this statement.

Boating/Launch:

- One respondent felt that Crystal Lake could not accommodate any more boats, further explaining that if there were more than three or four boats on the lake at one time, the lake was very full.

FWP – The object of this proposal is to reestablish historic public access to Crystal Lake that was lost in 2006. Boating traffic on the lake may result over time from population growth in the area, and measures taken to address this should not unfairly exclude public use.

Natural Resource:

- One respondent was concerned that since Crystal Lake did not have an inlet or outlet, the increased boat traffic and resulting pollutants could not be cycled out and thus would have a greater effect on the lake. The respondent continued to state that their preference was Alternative A; however, an alternative on the west side of the lake would be best if a public access was deemed necessary.

FWP – The object of this proposal is to reestablish historic public access to Crystal Lake that was lost in 2006. Boating traffic on the lake may result over time from population growth in the area, and measures taken to address this should not unfairly exclude public use.

Economic Issues:

Two comments received stated that if Alternative A was chosen and there was no public site at Crystal Lake, it would be an injustice to the taxpayers and licensed sportsmen of Montana.

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FWP – The agency purchased land on Crystal Lake for the purpose of providing fishing access and therefore agrees with this statement.

Alternative B: East Shore, via short access road.

There were a total of 67 comments that supported Alternative B as their first choice.

- One of these comments represented a form-like letter, of which FWP received eleven. The content of these letters was the same, and therefore all comments have been recorded and counted as a single comment.
- Another comment letter represented Flathead Wildlife, Inc., consisting of 100 members. This letter and all comments were counted as a single comment.
- The Libby Rod and Gun Club submitted one letter on behalf of their club. This letter and comments were counted as a single comment.
- Another letter was received representing two families. This letter and comments were counted as a single comment.
- One respondent felt that the effects of public use and access on adjacent private landowners, including user conflict and property devaluation, needed to be addressed with this alternative.

FWP – The agency will address social concerns such as noise, loss of privacy, litter, and latrine odor through site design and management. The impacts of park or fishing access land on adjacent private property values are inconclusive. There is a body of research that indicates that adjacent parklands create an increase in property values.

Social Impacts:

- There were two comments stating that this alternative would provide the most benefit to the public, and one of these went further to state that the land needs to be managed to benefit the public and that Alternative B provides adequate consideration for adjacent landowners.

FWP – The agency concurs with this statement.

- Four comments were received expressing serious concerns over noise that adjacent landowners will have to deal with.
- Three comments expressed concerns with smell from the vault toilet and its effect on the adjacent homeowners.
- There were three comments stating that litter would have an effect on the adjacent homeowners.

FWP – The agency believes that these concerns can be mitigated through site design and management.

- Five comments received stated that this alternative was favorable as it was the safest, most direct route and did not increase traffic around residents. However, another respondent did feel that there was already too much traffic and development on Lakeshore Drive.

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FWP – The agency believes that this alternative provides a safe and convenient location for public access to Crystal Lake. FWP does not believe that traffic volume associated with this site will have a significant impact on Lakeshore Drive.

- Three comments were received stating that the proposed access was too close to the adjacent homeowner. One of these respondents stated that he/she would feel uncomfortable using this site, as it might be disruptive to the neighbor.
- There was one respondent who felt that there was ample room from the adjacent homeowner, citing that most private cabins and lots were closer than 200 feet in proximity.
- There were nine comments regarding impacts to the adjacent homeowner. One of these respondents strongly urged FWP not to consider this alternative due to the personal experience it would have on the adjacent homeowner. Another respondent recognized that this alternative does have the potential to impact the adjacent homeowner and made the recommendation to work to mitigate the impact through the use of fencing and dust abatement. Seven comments reflected that this alternative had minimal impacts to one homeowner and was more feasible than impacting many.
- Two comments stated concern over the devaluation of the adjacent homeowner's property.
- Two respondents felt there would be a significant loss of privacy to the adjacent homeowner, while one respondent felt that there would be a slight loss of privacy, which should be expected if one is located adjacent to public land.
- There were two comments stating a concern for personal safety, especially at night, and the troubles this access might bring when the adjacent homeowners are not there.
- One respondent felt that this site was more desirable as it would be easier to maintain and patrol.
- One comment was received stating that this is the only alternative that reestablishes historical public boat access.
- Two respondents felt that this alternative had no additional impacts, other than what had been discussed in the EA, and had the least amount of adverse impacts on people.
- One respondent stated that this alternative adequately addressed public issues and environmental concerns by limiting the site to day use and providing a restroom and an occasional patrol. This respondent did not feel that the impacts would be any different than what occurred in the past at the previous boat launch.

FWP – The agency believes that these concerns can be mitigated through site design and management. Fences or vegetative barriers can be installed to lessen visual and noise-related impacts. Site management, including signage, night closure, and law enforcement patrols by FWP game wardens and park rangers will also serve to mitigate social impacts.

Infrastructure/Access:

- There were four comments addressing a concern for dust and the effect it would have on the adjacent residence.

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FWP – The agency will mitigate dust controls on this access road through the application of dust control products and through posted speed limit signs.

- Four respondents felt that this alternative provided a reasonable cost and the least amount of new road construction.
- There were 17 comments stating that this alternative provided the easiest and most direct route for public use.
- One comment was that this alternative provided the least impact to roads and residents.
- Another respondent stated that this alternative would be more fuel efficient for the public since it was closer to Highway 2.
- Ten comments supported this alternative in regard to winter access for ice fishing. These respondents felt that this alternative was the best due to the short distance from Highway 2, while two of these respondents also pointed out that winter access would be easier since Lakeshore Drive is paved and plowed.
- There were twelve respondents that felt this alternative provided the quickest and easiest route for emergency vehicles.
- Two respondents felt that road maintenance costs would be lower with this alternative.
- One respondent stated that this alternative requires no additional road easements.

FWP – The agency concurs with these statements.

Boating/Launch:

- Two respondents felt that this alternative provided the easiest access for launching watercraft.
- Four respondents stated the boat launch, water level, and gradient were adequate and provided for a good boat ramp site on the lake.

FWP – The agency concurs with these statements.

- Two respondents felt that there was a safety hazard with the proposed boat launch being less than 200 feet from the adjacent landowner's dock.
- One respondent felt that there would be safety issues from boats dropping off skiers next to a private area where people are swimming.

FWP – The agency realizes that motorboating activities have inherent risks. Current motorboat operating regulations are geared toward addressing these issues. Through site design, informational materials and signing, and law enforcement patrols, these impacts can be mitigated.

Wildlife:

- One respondent felt that loon habitat would not be disturbed with this alternative.
- Five comments stated that this alternative would cause the least impact to wildlife.

FWP – FWP wildlife biologists have expressed a higher level of concern for the development of boat-launching facilities on the west side of Crystal Lake. Loons have not been documented nesting on Crystal Lake in recent history, but water birds such as red-

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necked grebes, hooded mergansers, and golden eye do frequent the undeveloped bays and inlets on the west side of Crystal Lake.

Natural Resource:

- One comment received pointed out that there was more free area for parking in this site.

FWP – Regardless of site location, the development will have no more than ten parking spaces. Overflow parking will be prohibited.

- Four comments favored this alternative, as it would maintain the pristine and undeveloped nature of the west side of the lake.
- There was one comment stating that the risk of wildlife would be reduced in this alternative, since the east side was already developed.
- One comment received favored this site because the topography was relatively flat.
- Eleven respondents felt that this alternative would have the least amount of environmental impacts.

FWP – It is true that the west side of Crystal Lake will remain in a more natural condition under alternative B.

- There were five comments received regarding the pond. Two of these respondents felt that the impacts to the pond could be adequately mitigated, while the third respondent noted that four-wheelers have already been using the existing roadbed, so the additional impact would be minimal. Two other respondents felt that the road would adversely impact the pond.
- One respondent felt that the impact to water quality would be least with this alternative.

FWP – The agency does not feel that water quality will be significantly impacted beyond current conditions. FWP will utilize Best Management Practices (BMPs) in road design to mitigate impacts to the pond located within the project area.

Economic Issues:

- Thirty-seven comments were received regarding the allotted budget in relation to this alternative. All of these respondents supported this alternative, as it was the least costly and the only one that stayed within FWP's allotted budget. Two respondents went further to state that the excess budget could be used on other projects to improve or maintain sites elsewhere or perhaps add a picnic area to the Crystal Lake site.
- Seven respondents selected this alternative, as it was a lower cost to taxpayers, while one respondent felt it would be an injustice to taxpayers.

Management Concerns:

- Ten respondents felt that this alternative met both the objectives in the environmental assessment, of being within the budget and providing public access.
- One respondent felt that this alternative was most consistent with the TCL Mission as stated in the TCL Management Plan Update, adopted May 2006.

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Other:

- There were nine comments received that identified this as the ‘common sense’ alternative in terms of the most logical site with the least impacts and addressing the most public concerns.

FWP – The agency believes that this alternative will be the most fiscally responsible alternative and provides the greatest cost/benefit ratio when considering the small size of the development.

Alternative C: East Shore, via long access road.

There were two respondents who selected Alternative C as their first choice.

- One of these noted that this alternative would get their support if it were not so expensive.
- Another stated that C would be acceptable, but questioned why twice the amount of money should be spent.

FWP – The agency concurs with these statements. The cost/benefit ratio does not warrant the added expense of Alternative C.

Social Impacts:

- Four comments received felt that it was wrong to subject the adjacent neighbor to the noise that would be associated with this alternative.
- Three respondents commented on the negative impact the odors from vault toilet would have on the adjacent homeowner.
- There were three comments on litter and concern for the impact on the adjacent neighbor.
- One respondent felt there was too much traffic and development on Lakeshore Drive.
- There were three comments received that stated the proposed site was too close to the adjacent neighbor. One of these comments went further to state that as a recreationist, they would feel uncomfortable being that close to the adjacent homeowner and would feel as though they were disrupting the owner’s use and enjoyment of their property.
- One commenter strongly urged FWP not to select this alternative due to the personal experience it would have on the adjacent homeowner.
- Two respondents felt that the adjacent property owner’s property value would decrease.
- One commenter felt that this alternative would take away any privacy the adjacent homeowners had.
- Two comments stated a concern for the personal safety of the adjacent homeowner and their property.

FWP – The agency believes that these concerns can be mitigated through site design and management. Fences or vegetative barriers can be installed to lessen visual and noise-related impacts. Site management, including signage, night closure, and law enforcement patrols by FWP game wardens and park rangers, will also serve to mitigate social impacts.

Infrastructure/Access:

- Three comments stated a concern for the amount of dust that would be caused by the road and the effect on the adjacent neighbor.

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- Two respondents did not support this alternative, as it was more costly due to the amount of road construction.
- One comment stated that there was no logic in building a much longer access road to the proposed sites.
- There was one comment stating that this alternative would provide for less road maintenance, especially in relation to winter ice fishing.

FWP – During comment analysis, ice fishing access was frequently mentioned. FWP agrees that the increase in dust abatement and other maintenance requirements associated with this alternative, in combination with less ice fishing opportunity, make this alternative a poor choice.

Boating/Launch:

- Two commenters felt there were safety issues with this alternative. One of these issues was the adjacent homeowner's dock being only 200 feet away, and the other was with boats dropping off skiers next to a private area where people are swimming.

FWP – The agency realizes that motorboating activities have inherent risks. Current operating rules are geared toward addressing these issues. Through site design, informational materials and signing, and through law enforcement patrols, these impacts can be mitigated.

Wildlife:

- One commenter favored this alternative, as it would not negatively impact loon habitat.

FWP – Loons have not been documented nesting on Crystal Lake in recent history, but water birds such as red-necked grebes, hooded mergansers, and goldeneye do frequent the undeveloped bays and inlets on the west side of Crystal Lake.

Natural Resource:

- There were four comments received regarding the impact to the pond. Two of these comments stated that this alternative would have less impact to the pond than Alternative B, while two comments stated that there would be negative impacts to the pond.

FWP – The agency does not feel that water quality will be significantly impacted beyond current conditions. FWP will utilize BMPs in road design to mitigate impacts to the pond located within the project area.

Economic Issues:

- There were four comments that did not favor this alternative because it is not within FWP's budget.
- Another commenter felt that FWP should increase the budget to allow full consideration of this alternative, as the improved road in this parcel would allow for better active management of the entire parcel.

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FWP – The agency concurs with these statements. The cost/benefit ratio does not warrant the added expense of Alternative C.

General East Side Comments

Many respondents referred to the east side or shore in their comments, both for and against the site. These respondents did not specify an alternative or identify a travel route to the site, but merely commented on the east side as a whole. If a specific alternative was selected and identified in the comment, then those comments were recorded under the stated alternative. This section reflects those comments referring to the east side/shore.

There were seven respondents that selected the east side as their first choice.

Social Impacts:

- One comment was received favoring the east shore, as it is sunnier and therefore more conducive to picnicking.

FWP – This was not a consideration in site selection, as the primary use will be to launch and load boats.

- There were eleven comments in regard to the negative impact that noise from the public boat launch on the east shore would have on the adjacent neighbor. Two of these concerns were in regard to recreationists wanting to have fun without worrying about disturbing or having conflicts with adjacent neighbors. Three of these respondents felt that the noise would result from public drinking and partying, including overnight occurrences.
- Five comments were received voicing concern for the adjacent neighbor having to deal with odors from the vault latrine.
- There were four comments that stated concern of the effect that litter would have on the adjacent neighbor.
- One commenter felt that this site reduced the amount of visual offensiveness.
- One commenter was concerned that people could be driving down into the public boat launch at all times of the day or night.
- A total of 29 comments received did not support east shore development, as they felt that the public boat launch should not be so close to existing residences and docks, and did not have an adequate buffer for the significant adverse effects on the adjacent neighbor. Two of these commenters stated concern for recreating so close to private residences. However, there were two commenters who supported east side development. One of these felt this site would have the least amount of exposure to existing homes, and another felt that it was better to build where there was already development.
- Eleven commenters were highly concerned for the drastic impacts that this boat launch would have on the adjacent homeowner. Many of these felt that the adjacent homeowner's lifestyle would be seriously degraded and that it was unfair to place this burden on one family.
- Six comments stated concern that the development of a public site would decrease the value of the adjacent neighbor's property.

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- Two respondents felt that there would be potential conflicts between the adjacent homeowner and users of the public site.
- There were eleven respondents that voiced a concern for the loss of privacy for the adjacent neighbor. Two of these comments referred to concern over barking dogs early in the morning, while one respondent felt that some users would have no regard for the adjacent neighbor's privacy. One of these commenters felt that as a recreationist he/she would be encroaching on the adjacent neighbor's privacy.
- There were two comments stating a concern for the safety of adjacent homeowners, including the homeowners themselves not feeling that they could stay at their cabin alone overnight.
- Three commenters were concerned about trespass issues in regard to the adjacent neighbor.
- Twelve comments were received stating a concern for vandalism and theft of the adjacent neighbor's property with the public access being so close.
- One respondent felt that the east shore proposed site would lead to unnecessary risks.
- Three respondents voiced concern over the amount of law enforcement at the proposed site. One of these respondents felt that enforcement of policy with signage hardly seemed adequate. Another respondent felt that, due to the remote nature of Crystal Lake, the responsibility of policing the site would fall upon the private homeowners. The third respondent felt that, without 24/7 on-site enforcement, FWP couldn't assure that the quality of life for residents will not be harmed.
- Two commenters felt that the public would generally be disrespectful to adjacent homeowners and public property.

FWP – The parcel of ground on the east side of Crystal Lake was acquired in 1993, after a substantial public process, for the purpose of providing public recreation opportunities, as defined in the *Thompson Chain of Lakes Management Plan and Environmental Assessment of 1993*. FWP feels that this development is consistent with the intent of that acquisition.

The agency believes that these concerns can be mitigated through site design and management. Fences or vegetative barriers can be installed to mitigate visual and noise-related impacts. Site management including, signage, night closure, and law enforcement patrols by FWP game wardens and park rangers will also serve to mitigate social impacts.

Infrastructure/Access:

Four comments were received stating concern over dust and the effects on the adjacent neighbor.

- One respondent felt that the boat launch should be as accessible to Highway 2 as possible, while another respondent felt that this did not matter as there are many boat launches around Montana that are much farther away than the west side alternatives.
- Two commenters favored the east shore for development, as most of the road was already in place; therefore ground disturbance had already occurred, and it was the most direct route.
- One commenter felt that the east side would be more conducive to winter activity as it was sunnier.
- Two respondents stated that the east side would be best as it was more direct and quicker for emergency vehicles.

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FWP – The agency concurs with these statements. The cost/benefit ratio is the highest for Alternative B.

Boating/Launch:

- Two commenters felt that there was too much boat traffic on the east side already.
- Twenty-four comments received stated safety concerns with the boat launch being placed on the east shore. Of those twenty-four, thirteen commenters were concerned over the proximity of the public launch to the private dock and potential safety issues with swimmers at the private dock. Four of these commenters felt the safety concerns were due to the shoreline terrain and the point near the proposed boat launch. One of these respondents felt that there were safety issues with the 200' no-wake rule when trying to get to the boat ramp.
- One respondent was concerned that the east shore would not be a good site because it received more wind.
- One respondent felt the east shore would not be the best choice as it got more waves.
- Two commenters felt that boaters would have a difficult time abiding by the 200' no-wake rule on the east side.
- Another respondent was concerned that the adjacent neighbor would be impacted by the waves from motorboats.

FWP – The agency does not believe that the placement of this facility on FWP lands on the east side of Crystal lake creates a higher risk than any other location on the lake, private or public. Current operating rules are geared toward addressing these issues. Through site design, informational materials and signing, and through law enforcement patrols, these impacts can be mitigated.

Natural Resource:

- One respondent commented that the east side did not have room to expand, as did the west side.
- One respondent felt that the east side was the safest from the risk of wildfire, while four respondents felt there were fire danger issues with a residence in such close proximity.

FWP – There are no plans for site expansion under this proposal. FWP has completed an EA and prescription for fuels mitigation work on the east side parcel with the intention of mitigating fire dangers.

Alternative D: West Shore, via Rainbow Lake Road.

Of the comments received, no respondent chose this alternative as their first choice.

- Two of these commenters favored the west shore site, with no road preference; therefore Alternatives D and F were logged as a first choice for this commenter.
- Another felt that this was the only alternative that made sense; however, felt the number of parking spots should be reduced to six.

Social Impacts:

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- Two commenters felt that noise would be an issue with this alternative. One of these felt that the noise would affect many residences.
- One commenter felt the odor from the latrine would be an issue.
- One respondent felt that many residences would be impacted visually by this alternative.
- There were four respondents who felt that the proposed site was too close to the adjacent homeowner. One of these felt that, as a recreationist, he/she would be disrupting the adjacent homeowner.
- One respondent felt that the adjacent homeowner would lose property value as a result of this alternative.
- There was one commenter who felt the adjacent property owner would have a loss of privacy with this alternative.
- One commenter felt that the adjacent landowner would be vulnerable to theft.
- One respondent stated that this alternative would be harder to police.

FWP – Had this alternative been chosen, the agency feels that these impacts could have been mitigated through site design and management. The agency agrees that the more remote nature of this site would make it more difficult to police.

Infrastructure/Access:

- Two respondents felt that dust would be an issue with this alternative.
- Two commenters did not support this alternative, as it would require much more road construction.
- One commenter felt that there was no logic in building longer access roads to sites.
- One respondent felt that this alternative would be harder for emergency vehicles to access.
- One commenter did not support this alternative, as it would require obtaining road easements.

FWP – The agency agrees that the cost/benefit ratio does not make this alternative a wise choice. Furthermore, discussions with DNRC and Plum Creek Timber Company are not complete, and FWP currently has only administrative access across their respective properties along the access route in this alternative.

Vegetation:

- One respondent did not favor this alternative because large trees would need to be removed to construct the parking area.

FWP – Some large-diameter trees would need to be removed regardless of the alternative selected. The agency intends to minimize this loss to the greatest extent possible.

Wildlife:

- One commenter stated that the Rainbow Lake Road route would really affect wildlife as a result of increased traffic. The commenter also pointed out that deer and elk give birth around the area in the spring and thus would be affected.

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- One respondent was concerned about the effect this alternative would have on wildlife. The commenter continues by stating the area teems with waterfowl and wildlife and is one of the few areas unaffected by development in TCL.

FWP – The agency believes that wildlife impacts associated with this alternative would be slightly higher than those associated with alternatives on the east side of Crystal Lake. This would be due primarily to the more extensive development of roads needed to facilitate this alternative and to a heightened intensity of boating use in the shallow inlets on the west side of Crystal Lake that are frequented by water birds.

Natural Resource:

- One person commented that this alternative would adversely impact the pristine area.
- One respondent felt that the surrounding area of the proposed site is more conducive to camping and thus would cause issues with illegal camping, which in turn creates fire and sanitation problems.
- Two respondents felt that there were more adverse environmental impacts with this alternative than with others.
- One commenter was concerned with this alternative because the road came within 50 feet of the fen.
- There was one respondent who was concerned with this alternative because it had the highest surface runoff into the lake due to road improvement.

FWP – The agency agrees that this alternative would alter the current natural setting to some extent. It is not known if unauthorized camping would be more frequent with this alternative, but it would be more time consuming to conduct routine patrols. The fen would be protected through the implementation of BMPs.

Economic Issues:

- There were three commenters that felt this alternative was not suitable because it was well outside of the allotted budget.
- **FWP – The agency agrees that this site would be well outside of the allotted development budget. Additional funding requests would delay project completion. Funding for new FAS development is allocated on a statewide basis, is very limited, and requests for additional funding may not be approved.**

Alternative E: Turtle Cove, via Rainbow Lake Road.

There were a total of twelve respondents who chose the Turtle Cove site as their first choice.

- Seven of these commenters merely chose the Turtle Cove site, without selecting a road preference. Therefore, there were seven tallies added to both Alternative E and G as first choice.

Social Impacts:

- There was one commenter who felt that this alternative would impact many residents with noise from the site.

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- One individual felt that this alternative would have a visual impact on many residences, while another respondent felt that, although this alternative would be highly visible, they did not feel as though it would have near the significant impact that Alternatives B and C would have.
- One respondent felt that since there were no cabins nearby, campers would use the site unless monitored daily.
- One respondent felt that this alternative would protect homeowners from increased use on Lakeshore Drive.
- One respondent felt that because this alternative had no homes nearby, there would not be as many conflicts.
- One respondent felt this alternative was unacceptable due to safety concerns.
- One commenter felt that this alternative would be harder to police due to its remote location.
- There was one respondent who felt that this was a good alternative as it was a popular site for many years.

FWP – Had this alternative been chosen, the agency feels that social impacts could have been mitigated through site design and management. The agency agrees that the more remote nature of this site would make it more difficult to police. It is true that less mitigative measures would currently be needed due to lack of residential property in the Turtle Cove area.

Infrastructure/Access:

- There were three respondents who felt that this alternative was cost-prohibitive due to the amount of road construction that would need to occur.
- One respondent stated that there was no logic in creating longer access roads.
- One respondent preferred this alternative because he/she felt that having a longer access road would limit the amount of use on the lake, whereas a shorter, easier access road would result in increased use and higher impacts.
- One commenter felt that it would be harder for emergency vehicles to access the site with this alternative.
- One commenter did not like the fact that additional road easements would need to be obtained with this alternative.

FWP – The agency agrees that the cost/benefit ratio does not make this alternative a wise choice. Furthermore, discussions with DNRC and Plum Creek Timber Company are not complete, and FWP currently has only administrative access across their respective properties along the access route in this alternative.

Boating/Launch:

- One commenter felt that with this alternative the boat ramp would need to be the longest, as the gradient into the water is very gradual.
- One respondent felt that since this site was on a point, it would make it easier to drop off waterskiers and tubers.
- One respondent felt that this site posed a serious safety concern since the proposed ramp was on a point.

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- One commenter felt that water depth was adequate for a boat ramp, while three respondents felt that Turtle Cove was too shallow for boats and thus would result in lake-bottom and boat damage.

FWP – The agency felt that this site provided adequate water depth and gradients for construction of a boat launch. Adequate boat launching and loading is the primary purpose for this facility. If this alternative had been selected, the boat ramp would have been installed to the north of Turtle Cove point where water depths are adequate.

Wildlife:

- Four respondents had concern over the impact and disturbance of waterfowl, especially nesting, in and around Turtle Cove and nearby fen.
- One commenter felt that the longer access road would negatively impact wildlife, in addition to deer and elk in the area that give birth in the spring.
- Three respondents stated a concern over the amount of wildlife that use the area and the disturbance that this site would have on the wildlife. One of these respondents went further to state that this was one of the few sites unaffected by development in TCL.

FWP – The agency believes that wildlife impacts associated with this alternative would be slightly higher than those associated with alternatives on the east side of Crystal Lake. This would be due primarily to the more extensive development of roads needed to facilitate this alternative and to a heightened intensity of boating use in the shallow inlets on the west side of Crystal Lake that are frequented by water birds.

Natural Resource:

- Twelve commenters were concerned about losing the pristine and undeveloped nature of the area if this alternative were selected.
- Three respondents felt that the terrain in the proposed site was conducive to development and allowed room for expansion. Another commenter felt that, due to the terrain, it was more conducive to camping and thus would create future problems with illegal camping, which could lead to fire and sanitation problems.
- Four commenters felt that there would be unacceptable, adverse environmental impacts with this alternative.
- Two commenters stated concern with the proximity and impact to the fen with this alternative.
- One comment received stated concern regarding the amount of surface runoff into the lake that would occur due to road improvement.
- One respondent was concerned about the negative impact on water quality in the entire lake resulting from the shallowness of Turtle Cove and the mucky character of the bottom, which will be stirred up by heavy traffic.

FWP – The agency agrees that this alternative would alter the current natural setting. It is not known if unauthorized camping would be more frequent with this alternative, but it would be more difficult to conduct routine patrols. The fen would be protected through the implementation of BMPs. Surface runoff would be managed through site design and best

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management standards. If this alternative had been selected, the boat ramp would have been installed to the north of Turtle Cove point where water depths are adequate.

Economic Issues:

- Five respondents felt that this alternative was too expensive and not reasonable with the allotted budget, while one respondent stated that the least expensive option is almost never the correct one.
- Two respondents felt FWP needed to acquire the amount of funding to develop this alternative. One of these commenters went further to suggest that FWP sell one or two 100' pieces of lakefront property on the east side of Crystal Lake and apply the profits to road costs associated with this alternative.

FWP – The agency agrees that this cost/benefit ratio is too low with this alternative. Postponing the project until adequate funding can be secured penalizes the public through exclusion. FWP lands on Crystal Lake are encumbered by funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and the sale of these lands is strongly discouraged or prohibited. Furthermore, it is not in the public's best interest to divest of public lands in the Thompson Chain of Lakes area.

Alternative F: West Shore, via East Crystal Lake Road.

A total of nine respondents selected this as their preferred alternative.

- Four of these respondents preferred Alternatives F and G, so both were recorded as first choices.

Social Impacts:

- One respondent felt that this alternative provided a good option for the public.
- Three respondents had concern for the noise associated with this alternative, and one of these commenters felt the noise would impact many residents on the lake.
- There was one comment on the odor associated with the vault latrine.
- One respondent felt that this alternative would be harder to police.
- One respondent felt that litter would impact the adjacent homeowners.
- Five respondents felt that this alternative was too close to the adjacent neighbor, and one of these even stated that, as a recreationist, he/she would feel uncomfortable being that close to a homeowner. One commenter felt that this alternative was farthest from any homeowner.
- One commenter was concerned that the adjacent homeowner would have a loss of privacy.
- One respondent was concerned that the property value of the adjacent neighbor would decrease if this alternative were selected.

FWP – The agency would address social concerns, such as noise, loss of privacy, litter, and latrine odor, through site design and management. The impact of adjacent park or fishing access land on property value is inconclusive. There is a body of research that indicates that adjacent parklands create an increase in property values.

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- Three commenters felt that this alternative would negatively impact the homeowners on Lakeshore Drive from an increase in traffic. One of these commenters pointed out that many people walk or ride bikes on Lakeshore Drive.
- One respondent felt this alternative would visually impact many residences.
- One commenter felt that this alternative provided the least amount of impact to any homeowner.
- One commenter felt this alternative was unacceptable due to safety concerns, while another felt that theft was a serious issue for adjacent property owners.
- One commenter stated that this alternative would place extreme pressure on Lakeshore Drive and create safety issues, as many residents need to back out of their driveways onto Lakeshore Drive. The fourth commenter felt that Lakeshore Drive was too narrow and that, as a result, the road would need to be widened, relocated, or have pullouts added to accommodate safe travel.

FWP – It is true that a boat launch on the west shore of Crystal Lake would be visible from residential properties on the east side. FWP would have provided as much visual screening as reasonable within site designs. FWP would be required to mitigate impacts associated with increased vehicle traffic on Lakeshore Drive and East Lakeshore Drive had this alternative been selected.

Infrastructure/Access:

- Two commenters felt that this alternative required too much additional road construction.
- Four comments were received in regard to the access road in this alternative. One of these commenters felt that there was no logic in creating longer access roads to sites. Another of these commenters stated that Crystal Lake Road was a private road and had the concern that even if another access road was selected, people would still use this road and eventually the homeowners would close the road.
- One commenter stated that it would be harder for emergency vehicles to access the lake with this alternative.

FWP – The agency agrees that this alternative does not offer a good cost/benefit ratio for a small development. Communications with the Lincoln County Road Department indicate that Crystal Lake Road and East Crystal Lake Road are county roads.

Wildlife:

- One respondent commented that this area teemed with waterfowl and wildlife and was one of the few areas unaffected by development in TCL.

FWP – The agency believes that wildlife impacts associated with this alternative would be slightly higher than those associated with alternatives on the east side of Crystal Lake. This would be due primarily to the more extensive development of roads needed to facilitate this alternative and to a heightened intensity of boating use in the shallow inlets on the west side of Crystal Lake that are frequented by water birds.

Natural Resource:

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- One commenter felt this alternative provided more room for the proposed site.
- One commenter felt this alternative would adversely affect the pristine nature of the area.
- One commenter was concerned that the area was conducive to camping, which would lead to illegal camping, and fire and sanitation issues.
- Three respondents were concerned about adverse environmental impacts associated with this alternative.
- One respondent felt the road was too close to the fen with this alternative.
- Two commenters were highly concerned about the amount of surface runoff into Crystal Lake.

FWP – There are no plans for site expansion beyond this proposal. The agency agrees that this alternative would alter the current natural setting of the west side of Crystal Lake. It is not known if unauthorized camping would be more frequent with this alternative, but it would be more difficult to conduct routine patrols. The fen would be protected through the implementation of BMPs. Surface runoff would be managed through site design and best management standards.

Alternative G: Turtle Cove, via East Crystal Lake Road.

A total of 63 respondents selected this alternative as their first preference.

- Seven of these did not have an access road preference, merely preferring this boat launch location; therefore, Alternatives E and G were recorded as first choices.
- Four of these preferred Alternatives F and/or G, so both were recorded as first choices.
- One of these respondents stated he/she would support this alternative only if FWP was certain that the public would not damage the area, as he/she believed it would be.

Social Impacts:

- One commenter felt that this alternative was ideal for swimming and relaxing.
- One commenter felt that this alternative addressed the issue of noise; another felt that many residences would be impacted by noise from this site.
- One commenter felt that this alternative addressed the issue of litter in regard to adjacent homeowners.
- One commenter felt that this alternative provided an access away from the highway, which would make it less attractive to those who might be a nuisance and danger to private landowners.
- Two commenters supported this alternative, as it protected homes on Crystal Lake from vandalism and theft.
- Ten respondents supported this alternative since it was not adjacent to any homeowners and had a large buffer zone.
- Nine commenters supported this alternative, as it did not impact any individual homeowners significantly.
- Three respondents felt that this alternative protected homeowner privacy, and three respondents felt that the site would be more private for the public.
- Three commenters stated that the increase of traffic would negatively affect 20-30 homeowners on Lakeshore Drive. One commenter also pointed out that many people use Lakeshore Drive to walk or ride bikes.

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FWP – The agency agrees that this site is more remote, with fewer adjacent residential properties. This is offset by the necessity to travel through a highly developed area along Crystal Lake Road and East Crystal Lake Road to access the site under this alternative. While vandalism and theft are reasonable concerns, FWP does not agree that there will be more likelihood of these activities under the other alternatives. FWP has found vandalism and other illegal activities are more a function of poor site design and lack of law enforcement presence as opposed to the level of remoteness.

Infrastructure/Access: Three respondents felt that this alternative required too much road construction and cost.

- A total of eight comments were received in relation to roads with this alternative. Four of these commenters liked this alternative because the roads were paved when passing by a residence. One commenter did not see the logic in creating longer access roads to sites. Another respondent commented that Lakeshore Drive was a private road and even if the other access road were developed, users would still use Lakeshore Drive and that the homeowners would most likely close the road. Another comment received stated that this alternative would place extreme pressure on Lakeshore Drive and create safety issues, as many residents need to back out of their driveways onto Lakeshore Drive. The last commenter felt that Lakeshore Drive was too narrow and that, as a result, the road would need to be widened, relocated, or have pullouts added to accommodate safe travel.
- One commenter stated that the existing area where ice fishermen access Crystal Lake will continue to be an option, in the event the far side road is not plowed.
- While one commenter felt that this alternative would be harder for emergency vehicles, another commenter felt that the emergency vehicles would not need to go too far past existing homes.
- One commenter did not support this alternative, as it would require obtaining more road easements.

FWP – FWP feels that, at over three times the cost of development when compared to Alternative B, the cost/benefit ratio does not justify Alternative G. The estimated cost does not account for the potential improvements to Crystal Lake Road that may be needed to accommodate associated trailer traffic. Communication with the Lincoln County Road Department indicates that Crystal Lake Road is a county road, and therefore easements would not be required.

Wildlife:

- Two respondents felt that waterfowl nesting would be impacted by this alternative.
- While one commenter felt that turtle habitat would be adversely impacted, another felt that turtles would not be impacted because the launch was not where the turtles are located on the southern shoreline of Turtle Cove.
- Two commenters thought that wildlife would be adversely impacted by this alternative, and one went further to point out that the EA does not propose any mitigation for this adverse effect.

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- Three respondents did not support this alternative as there was a high concentration of wildlife in the area, and one went further to state that the area was one of the few unaffected by development in TCL.

FWP – The agency believes that wildlife impacts associated with this alternative would be slightly higher than those associated with alternatives on the east side of Crystal Lake. This would be due primarily to the more extensive development of roads needed to facilitate this alternative and to a heightened intensity of boating use in the shallow inlets on the west side of Crystal Lake that are frequented by water birds.

Natural Resource:

There were a total of ten respondents who felt that this alternative provided plenty of space for the proposed site and room to expand in the future.

- Twelve respondents felt that this was the most pristine part of the lake and should be left undeveloped.
- Six respondents felt that the topography was good for a site at this location, while one commenter was concerned that the area was conducive to camping and would cause problems with illegal camping, followed by fire and sanitation issues.
- Two commenters did not support this alternative because there were more adverse environmental impacts, while another respondent felt that there would be no impact to Turtle Cove.
- Two commenters felt that the road was too close to the fen, and thus would cause adverse impacts.

FWP – The agency agrees that this alternative would alter the current natural setting. It is not known if unauthorized camping would be more frequent with this alternative, but it would be more difficult to conduct routine patrols. The fen would be protected through the implementation of BMPs.

Economic Issues:

- Three commenters supported this alternative, as it was close to the allotted budget and the least expensive alternative on the west side, while minimizing the social impacts. Four commenters felt that this alternative was not feasible as it was outside of the allotted budget. Three commenters felt that FWP should wait until the appropriate funds were gathered and then develop this site correctly, and two other commenters felt that FWP should consider selling other property to fund this project.
- One commenter felt that it was more cost effective to have the shortest distance for roads.
- Another commenter felt that spending the money now to develop this alternative would be an investment in Montana's future growth.

FWP – The agency agrees that this cost/benefit ratio is too low with this alternative. Postponing the project until adequate funding can be secured penalizes the public through exclusion. FWP lands on Crystal Lake are encumbered by funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and the sale of these lands is strongly discouraged or prohibited. Furthermore, it is not in the public's best interest to divest of public lands in the Thompson Chain of Lakes area.

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General West Side Comments

In the comment letters, many respondents referred to the west shore or west side of Crystal Lake. Those comments were logged under this general category, unless a specific alternative was noted in conjunction with the comment. This section reflects those comments referring to the west side of Crystal Lake.

A total of sixteen respondents selected the west side as their first preference. These respondents did not select a specific alternative or access route.

- One of these respondents stated that he/she hesitated to select a site on the west shore because it made no difference where it was, as long as fishermen were given a place to access Crystal Lake, and the site provided deep enough water, privacy, and a decent turn-around for parking.

Social Impacts:

- Two commenters felt that noise would be an issue with the west side sites, while one commenter felt noise would not reach homeowners. Another commenter felt that since the west side was farther from the bars on Highway 2, it would be a less likely stop for those wanting to take a swim after being at the bars, and thus would not have the noise issues that the east side would have.
- One commenter felt that the odor from the vault latrine would not carry to homeowners.
- One commenter stated that litter would not reach homeowners from the west side.
- There were seven comments regarding proximity to homeowners. Five of these commenters felt that the west side was a good option because there were no homes nearby. Two of these respondents felt that, as recreationists, they would not like to recreate next to a private homeowner, therefore they preferred the west side of the lake.
- One commenter felt that this option would provide privacy for both homeowners and site users.
- While four respondents felt that this option would minimize risks of theft, vandalism, and safety to homeowners, one commenter felt that the risk of vandalism would increase due to the remote nature of the site.
- One commenter stated that without 24/7 on-site enforcement, FWP cannot assure that the quality of living will not be damaged for the west and east side alternatives.

FWP – The agency mitigates illegal activities through site design and law enforcement presence. By placing the access point closer to US Highway 2 West, FWP will be able to more easily provide routine law enforcement patrols.

Infrastructure/Access:

- One commenter felt that dust would not reach homeowners from the west side.
- Three commenters felt that the cost of roads did not make the west side alternatives feasible.
- One commenter felt that it was difficult to get to the FWP property on the west side.
- Three commenters were concerned that ice fisherman would not be able to use the site at all in the winter if the road weren't plowed.
- One individual was concerned that it would take emergency vehicles a long time to get to the west side of the lake.

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- One commenter did not favor the west side because FWP did not currently have access easements.

FWP – FWP would incur far greater development costs and maintenance responsibilities with a development on the west side of Crystal Lake. At the same time, the public would be penalized, particularly during the ice-fishing season, by having to travel farther. Additionally, ice-angling opportunities would diminish, as the operational cost of keeping a route to the west side of the lake plowed would be prohibitive.

Vegetation:

- Two commenters felt that developing the west side would result in the spread of noxious weeds over a larger area.

FWP – The agency does not feel that potential for noxious weed spread would be greater on the west side of Crystal Lake.

Wildlife:

- Two commenters felt that development would interfere with wildlife habitat, including waterfowl nesting.
- One commenter felt that this option would affect prime wildlife viewing.
- Ten comments were received regarding wildlife disturbance. Two of these commenters felt that wildlife would not be disturbed any more than on the east side, and one commenter further stated that the environmental assessment did not state why concerns on the west side were any different than the east side. Eight commenters felt that developing on the west side of Crystal Lake would have an adverse impact to wildlife. Of these, one noted that the area was closed in 1996 due to wildlife concerns. Another of these stated that an improved road along the backside of the lake would create a barrier for wildlife accessing the lake and fen, and would increase the potential for vehicle/wildlife encounters and likely increase wildlife mortality.
- Two commenters felt that the west side was heavily used by wildlife and that development would have an adverse impact on wildlife usage of the area.
- Another commenter stated concerns of adverse impacts of watercraft in the shallow waters of Turtle Cove.

FWP – The agency believes that wildlife impacts associated with this alternative would be slightly higher than those associated with the alternatives on the east side of Crystal Lake. This would be due primarily to the more extensive development of roads needed to facilitate this alternative and to a heightened intensity of boating use in the shallow inlets on the west side of Crystal Lake that are frequented by water birds.

Natural Resource:

- Ten respondents liked that the west side had lots of space and room to expand.
- Ten commenters did not favor the west side for development, as it would change the open, pristine nature of the area.
- Four commenters felt that the risk of wildfire would increase if the boat launch were on the west side.

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- Three individuals stated that this option would have adverse environmental impacts. Two of these noted that the area was closed in 1996 due to environmental concerns, and the other felt that west side development would adversely impact soils.
- One commenter was concerned about the impacts on the fen.
- Three commenters were concerned about the fen. One of these commenters stated that he/she had already seen ATVs driving in the shallow waters of Turtle Cove, accessing it by way of the west shore FWP property. Another of these commenters felt that a lake of this size with natural springs needs a 'breathing area' for filtration and was thus concerned regarding the effect of dust from roads on the wetland system.

FWP – The agency agrees that this alternative would alter the current natural setting. There are no plans within this project to expand beyond that which is detailed in the EA. The fen would be protected through the implementation of BMPs. Road dust, regardless of which alternative, would be mitigated by chemical treatment.

Economic Issues:

- There were a total of six comments in regard to the allotted budget. Three of these commenters felt that FWP should wait until funds were available to develop on the west side. One commenter felt that the budget was not realistic from the start. Another stated that the decision should not be based on cost. One commenter felt that the west side alternatives were too expensive to consider for developing and maintaining.

FWP – The agency must consider the cost of development and long-term maintenance when considering a new boating facility. FWP maintains approximately 320 fishing access sites statewide. As a matter of fiscal responsibility, the agency must weigh the cost/benefit ratio. In this case, the size and scope of this development is in line with the allotted budget, based on similar developments elsewhere in the state.

Management Concerns:

- Two commenters felt that developing on the west side of Crystal Lake did not follow the intent of the TCL Management Plan.
- One commenter felt that the west side alternatives violated the Chain of Lakes agreement and its original intent.

FWP – The parcels of ground on the east and west sides of Crystal Lake were acquired in 1993, after a substantial public process, for the purpose of providing public recreation opportunities, as defined in the *Thompson Chain of Lakes Management Plan and Environmental Assessment of 1993*. That document identifies both the east and the west sides of Crystal Lake as areas for future development of recreational amenities. FWP feels that this development is consistent with the intent of that acquisition regardless of the alternative. However, the *Thompson Chain of Lakes Management Plan Update of 2006* indicates that any management activities on the west side of Crystal Lake should “consider impacts to wildlife on an equal footing with recreational needs.” Therefore, the document states a clear preference for development on the east shore parcel.

General Comment Compilation

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These comments were general comments that were not related to any alternative. They are organized into the same ten categories used in the alternative analysis. Subheadings have been listed if feasible.

Social Impacts:

Good Neighbor Policy

- Montana's good neighbor policy requires priority be given to maintenance of existing sites and requires FWP to seek a goal of "no impact" on adjoining property. Why have a policy if it is not being followed?
- Why have such a thing as a Good Neighbor Policy if FWP can decide that impact on adjoining land is not significant? Policies like these are made because private lands that adjoin public recreational lands are impacted.

FWP - The agency feels that this project is consistent with the Good Neighbor Policy (23-1-126 MCA). Through site design and management, FWP is implementing measures that will reduce or eliminate impacts to adjoining private land from noxious weeds, trespass, litter, noise, light pollution, and loss of privacy.

The purpose of this proposed project is to reestablish historic public access to Crystal Lake, while maintaining an emphasis on maintenance as described in 23-1-127 MCA. This will be accomplished through the installation of a latrine, screening fences or vegetative barriers, a boat ramp, and an access road. Additionally, the site will be designated for "day use only" with no overnight camping allowed. The prohibition of overnight camping will eliminate public use of the site at times when noise, light pollution and other related social impacts to neighbors would typically occur. Signs will be posted to this effect and will be enforced by FWP personnel.

FWP has hired two recreation wardens in the Kalispell Regional Office, of which one is assigned primarily to the TCL. Significant headway has been made in recent years at TCL in controlling historic behavior problems through the implementation of various management changes and aggressive enforcement action. This site will also be patrolled by Department wardens and other Department personnel on a routine basis.

This proposal, like all FAS development proposals, is legislatively approved.

Traffic/Road Survey

- Not only is watercraft activity increasing at Crystal, but also road traffic. A rarity in the past, ATVs and motorcycles now abound on the roads around Crystal and Thompson Lakes, and compete with autos, bicycles, and walkers. Most of the site alternatives would require access routes along private property, and boat access traffic will increase noise and may increase the potential for accidents. Again, there is no road-use survey to determine feasibility of accommodating anticipated increased traffic on existing roads.
- The road design [at Happy's] had features that required slow driving speed, which minimized dust.

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- I visited with a gentleman from the Lincoln County Road Department this week. He inferred that the Crystal Lake boat access is a major concern for Lincoln County and wondered if the county might be willing to share in the cost of developing the access route with FWP since the road is for public benefit to the citizens of Lincoln County. I suggest that you contact Lincoln County authorities for further discussion of this matter.

Winter Access

- I failed to find a discussion of winter fishing access to Crystal Lake in the EA. Jim Vashro, Regional Fisheries Manager, says that 40-50% of the public fishing pressure on Crystal Lake is in the winter.
- Provisions should be made to maintain that site during the winter months to accommodate ice fishermen. Improving the access site would also make it easier for FWP hatchery staff to release fish from hatchery trucks into Crystal Lake.

FWP – It became apparent through public comment that ice-fishing opportunity was a key issue. This issue did impact the agency's decision.

Access

- Road access: The only road that does not have legal or physical problems in the alternatives discussed in the draft EA (except the no-action alternative) is the first one-quarter mile of Lakeshore Drive that borders FWP ownership on the east side of Crystal Lake. Both Lakeshore Drive and East Crystal Lake Drive only have a 40-foot right-of-way (ROW) width. These roads would need to be reconstructed to a double-lane standard for safety purposes and an additional 20 feet of ROW width would be needed.
- Best road access option (east side): Lakeshore Drive has a road junction about 200 feet from the cattle guard as you leave Highway 2. There is an old existing road on FWP land at this road junction that could be reconstructed (some reconstruction could be done during your proposed logging of this area). I have shown by a dashed line the new road location on Exhibit B (if you decide to establish the boat ramp on the east side). This route would also provide much better long-term management options for the FWP east side ownership. This road location would alleviate numerous problems with adjoining private owners, an existing wetland, and an icy hill to negotiate during the winter months for people ice fishing, and avoid a tight curve on the Alternative C route. I recommend FWP not consider using either Alternative B or C if you decide to establish a boat ramp on the east side. Road access to a boat ramp on the west shore is going to be difficult to resolve in the short term. Physical problems exist with all the routes considered in the draft EA. Road reconstruction and bridge replacement will be required. None of the routes considered to access the west shore have adequate legal access, especially rights for the public to use these roads. Research of legal documents shows all the roads, except the Lakeshore Drive route, had ROW easements exchanged only for natural resource management purposes.

FWP – The agency has analyzed the alternatives to accessing the east shore site within the 72-acre Department-owned parcel. Again, the cost/benefit ratio does not justify these expenditures. FWP feels that funding would be better aimed at mitigative measures at the

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launch site itself, as this appears to be where the greatest amount of concern has been raised.

- Another west-side location: A route that accesses Bootjack, Lilly Pad, and Horseshoe Lakes from Highway 2 is entirely under FWP ownership. A connector road would be needed to tie into the old existing road on the west side. More research is needed since both legal and physical problems could complicate this proposed road location. I have included an Exhibit C (3 photos) to show the existing roads and dashed line for new construction. Distance would be a little shorter to a west shore ramp using this location versus the Upper Thompson Lake route.

FWP – Like Alternatives D & E, the route via the Horseshoe Lake Road would require easements with Plum Creek Timber Company to be developed. Mutual easement talks have been underway for some time, but easement across this parcel is not assured. Therefore this option is not available.

Boating/Launch:

Number of Boats/Parking Spots

- The proposal is for 6-10 parking spots at this access. I believe this is way too many for a lake this size. There would be no room for any boat to move safely. I would encourage you to amend this proposal to be 4-6 spaces at the most.
- Crystal Lake is already a very busy lake, mostly with jet skis and waterskiers. I have never seen many fishermen on this lake. I believe this is already a lake in danger of damage due to recreation by the many people that live on this lake. Have you considered all the new neighborhoods in this area? I have grave concern for the future of this lake.
- My family actually quit going to Crystal Lake so often because on weekends it is so congested with boats and waterskiers, tubers, and personal watercraft.
- I did not see any boating capacity study information in the document. Without a capacity study, how can the FWP analyze effects to water quality, recreation, noise, and safety? This should be a part of any plan to increase boat traffic. In fact, throughout the document, I did not see any units of measure. With the new developments around the lake, watercraft activity will continue to increase; this in turn means more water pollution, noise, wildlife conflicts, and safety issues. The proposed action of 6-10 additional watercraft is a substantial number of watercraft and cannot be considered a non-impact to water quality, wildlife security, recreation, noise, and safety.
- The lake is extremely busy on most summer weekends. I do wonder if 6-10 parking spaces may make this even worse. I did not feel that your EA addressed the issue of lake health and if it could handle this launch. Are you aware of the property being sold in this area? (19 of 26 lots were sold on Fisher River, last I knew, less than 1 mile from Crystal Lake.) There is also property being sold around Rainbow Lake and over 50 homes on Crystal Lake.
- The small size of the lake is a major concern. The Happy's Inn access site was paid-to-use only; this limited the use of their boat ramp. You say the FAS is intended to replace a private boat launch that allowed public access; therefore, the boat traffic on Crystal Lake and resulting noise should not increase. This is false. A new FAS with "6-10" parking spots would drastically increase noise and other negative impacts. We don't want

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numerous jet skis (not fishing boats) running all over the lake spoiling a beautiful, peaceful setting. The new FAS brings many concerns and negative impacts for lake residents. I see no positive impacts for lake residents as a result of the proposed FAS.

- We usually found [at Happy's] only at most a couple other boats using the launch...they orderly and quietly launched their boats.
- In addition to water usage and residential pollution, motorboat size and traffic have increased substantially in the past few years. Several times throughout the EA there is reference to Crystal Lake having public access in the past. With only a few exceptions, it was not a problem then, but the area has changed considerably in recent years. Now boats on the lake are larger and faster and there are more of them. In addition, jet ski use is now a substantial part of watercraft used on the lake. The result is more water pollution, more noise, and greater safety issues. I have witnessed several close calls in the past two years between ski boats, jet skis, waterskiers, and tubes. Crafts are coming in closer to shore in an effort to avoid each other than in years past, presenting a danger to swimmers. Why the FWP has taken that stance that boating conditions are the same as in years past makes me question the soundness of the FWP's collective mind.
- First and foremost I think you need to consider the health of this lake. There were a number of lots across from Midway Market, which were recently sold. Take into account the land behind Happy's Inn that has been sold into lots, the land around Rainbow Lake and Upper Thompson, and this is one busy area and lake. How much can it take? I wonder if your department is considering what is best for this lake or instead considering what is best for a few fishermen and homeowners who don't want to pay for their own boat ramps.
- First and foremost, the proposed activity does not differentiate between fishing boats and other types of boats. Although the project is described as fishing access, the EA goes on to describe a need for motorboat access. These different types of boats are not equal in terms of ecological or sociological impacts. But those differences are not described or analyzed separately in the document.

Change in Surrounding Community

- Aside from the semantics, I feel given the changes occurring in the area, including development at Rainbow and Upper Thompson Lakes, the Plum Creek subdivision, Happy's Inn Complex development, and societal trends toward large lake homes, that there is a heavy ecological strain on Crystal Lake. The cabins around Crystal used to be simple, summer vacation homes. That has now changed to yearlong residences with washers, fertilized lawns, even swimming pools, many of which take water from the lake or wells that supply spring water to the lake. The area is in a siege of development, and I feel that the FWP cannot adequately measure the ecological impacts of this project at this time, as the cumulative impacts of the project and the others mentioned have the potential to be great. In fact, the EA does not display cumulative impacts for most of the issues, although foreseeable actions are quite apparent, and their effects on resources (yes, I believe this is a critical omission in your document).
- Finally, while closure of the public beach has made it difficult to access Crystal, in some ways that is a benefit to the resources. Those of us that used the boat ramp too can attest to the erosion, litter, vegetative damage, and oil slicks that occurred in that area. Most landowners that used the public access have had time to make other arrangements for

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access. I, like many, do not feel that every lake in the COLs needs to have public access. I dislike the idea of the former public beach not being public anymore, but I don't feel that a boating access would provide the same recreation opportunities for the public. There still would not be a beach, picnic, or designated swimming area. In fact, it would provide only the recreation (boating) that has the most negative impacts to the resources. And it seems to me the cost-to-benefit ratio is low when all things are considered. My feeling is that FWP would be wise to take the money allocated for this project and use it to clean up and maintain existing FWP sites.

- Being a homeowner on Crystal Lake, I would like to point out that the previous boating access was not an access comparable to the quality of what has been proposed. No ramp, no latrine, no designated parking! The fact that it existed was no more than word of mouth or knowledge of the area. There is other public access to this lake of comparable function. A new "advertised" access will create more use of a small lake, lowering the pristine qualities of the lake.

FWP – This project is intended to reestablish historic public access to Crystal Lake. Property owned by FWP on Crystal Lake was acquired in 1993 for this purpose with strong public support. When the Happy's Inn access was lost to the public, there was a strong response from the public to reestablish that access. FWP approached the new owners of Happy's Inn with an offer to compensate them for access. They did not wish to pursue this.

An increase in watercraft use on lakes is a common issue in administrative Region One. A process exists by which citizens can pursue motorboat restrictions on water bodies in Montana. FWP feels that exclusion of the public from a water body is not an equitable tool for managing user conflicts. Cumulative effects are evaluated in this EA to the extent that is reasonable.

Water Safety

- My wife, Diane, and I live part of the year on Crystal Lake. We understand the need and rights of the public to use this lake. However, Crystal Lake, for its size, has more water recreation than any other lake within the Thompson Chain of Lakes complex. Safety is a primary concern for the different types of water activities. When a public boat ramp is again established on the lake, I suggest gating the road to the ramp at night during the primary summer season. Also, control may be needed for activities around the boat ramp area including ski boat and jet ski use. Further water use restrictions may also be needed in the future on Crystal Lake for safety and water quality.

FWP – A night closure gate will be installed to this boat-launching site, in addition to day-use-only signage. This gate can and will be utilized if illegal activity warrants it.

Vegetation:

- The FWP has not done a good job in the past of managing the terrestrial weeds at existing fishing accesses. The one that comes to mind is the McGregor Lake access. Not only is the access weed-infested, it is also aesthetically displeasing. I would not like to see anything similar at Crystal Lake. As you mention in the document, the roads accessing

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the proposed sites are weed-infested. To commence with soil-disturbing activities without controlling the weeds that are currently there will without doubt increase the amount of weeds in the area of the access. Part of your mitigations should include controlling weeds prior to any ground-disturbing activity to reduce the seed bank.

- We request that FWP consider biological controls for weeds, especially spotted knapweed.

FWP – Noxious weed treatment will be a management component of this project. Currently, herbicide application is the primary method of treatment by regional Parks staff, but an integrated approach may be tried at this project location.

- If putting a public launch on this lake is so important, I would suggest you go through your studies to see actually how much fishing has been done on this lake. I believe the homeowners of this lake and nearby lakes are campaigning for access. I would be very surprised to find that your fishing studies find this to be that popular of a lake. It is too warm and too busy with jet skis for most hours of the day.

FWP – Angler pressure studies conducted by FWP indicate that since 2004 Crystal Lake receives approximately 3,000 angler days per year. This ranks the lake as number 32 out of 340 fishable water bodies in Region One for fishing pressure.

Wildlife:

- Wildlife issues on the west shore that were listed in your report can be said for all wildlife around that lake. Are the deer, turtles, etc. less important on the north, south, and east side of the lake?
- Wildlife is found all around that lake, so I am not worried about that.

FWP – The agency feels that this project will not significantly impact wildlife. The Thompson Chain of Lakes Management Plan Update of 2006 does give slightly higher priority to wildlife habitat on the west side of Crystal Lake.

Violation of COL Agreement

- Being familiar with the original Chain of Lakes agreement, I am not sure any of the access proposals are allowed under the original COL agreement. I do not remember any lake access being required, under the agreement, to have, or where the management agency, Montana FWP, was required to provide, access to any or all of the natural lakes in the Chain of Lakes. So we feel this is the first question that needs to be researched, addressed, and considered. Now if access must be provided by MFWP, as this particular lake is a fishery that the state of Montana provides fish stock for, then that is a different issue for providing public lake access. None of this is addressed in this Crystal Lake Access EA, other than the "implied goal" of the MFWP and this EA is that public access must be provided to Crystal Lake now and in the future. This is considered to be an issue now that previous public access at Happy's Inn was recently closed after privatization of this property. So currently Crystal Lake has no public access, which it did in the past prior to the recent Happy's Inn ownership change. Is that a real issue for MFWP, the COL agreement, or is the issue something else? I do not feel that any of this is really

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addressed in this EA, and needs to be. We feel all of the previous issues of the past public access, and the requirements of the original COL agreement with the private owners within the COL and the MFWP, have drastically changed and should be addressed in this EA. Issues that are not considered under this EA we feel are: changes in the development within the entire COL management area, the increase in homes as permanent residences, size of homes and the impact on area lakes, overall water quality, fire hazard with recreational activity increases and development, noxious weeds containment and their future spread, increased traffic in the COL area year-round, ATV use and heavier use of all COL lakes by recreationists, with power boats, jet skis and non-motorized watercraft. All of this needs to be considered in the future plans and public use in this EA. This being said and the agreement or reconsideration of the above issues or questions, we feel that the other issue is the overall cost of any access development, be it launch facilities and infrastructure, road access to the site, and future maintenance. I think the cheapest and probably the lowest impact needs to be considered in these access options and the selection of a site, if warranted.

FWP – The agency feels that this project is consistent with the intent of the *Thompson Chain of Lakes Management Plan and Environmental Assessment of 1993*. This document articulates the management goal of lands acquired for the Thompson Chain of Lakes Fishing Access Site (TCL), including Crystal Lake, as follows: “*TCL will be managed as a fishing access area for traditional dispersed recreation use, with management and development consistent with FWP’s fishing access program. The focus will be on protecting the resource and providing public access for the purpose of boating and fishing (i.e., boat ramps, parking and road improvements, vault toilets, signing, and fencing.*”

FWP – FWP feels that this project is consistent with the public’s desire to see low-level, primitive developments to facilitate boating access in the TCL FAS.

- Have FWP perhaps already made their decision? According to Warren Illi in the Flathead Wildlife Newsletter, (nearly two months before your EA came out) the decision apparently has been made to put the access in the "obvious" location on the highway side next to a paved county road. It is my concern that Mr. Illi may have inside information and could be receiving preferential treatment.

FWP – FWP is aware of this newsletter. The agency was extremely careful to not predispose members of the public to any outcome. FWP utilized an extensive evaluation of public comment to reach a decision on this project.

- There is already an existing public site on the west shore. Why close this down and start all over?

FWP – There is no existing public boat launch on the west side of Crystal Lake. The public is not prohibited from utilizing FWP lands on the west side of Crystal Lake for day use activities.

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The following comments are of an editorial nature. FWP discloses these comments for the public record, but does not offer a response.

- It's really too bad the FWP didn't buy Happy's and then lease it to someone, and then the access never would have been lost. Maybe next time?
- According to my fishing friends, opposition to this access site is originating with an adjacent landowner. This landowner bought property on the lake after FWP had purchased land for the public's use. The landowner's property is nearly 60 yards from the proposed boat launch site. We hear a lot of protests from Private Property Rights advocates in N.W. Montana every time they think "Government" is trying to hinder them. When will they realize that the "Public" has rights? The general public and, more specifically, the sportsmen of this state, have Public Property Rights associated with our PUBLIC lands. The last two times, (i.e., Lake Five & Crystal Lake) FWP has tried to develop a public access site in N.W. Montana, it has been sued or threatened with lawsuit. These lawsuits cost public money to defend, often require more costly studies and further delay the implementation of reasonable Rights held by the public. When private parties try to commandeer public property for their own personal use, by threats, intimidation, signage, usage, etc., THEY should be held accountable in the criminal and civil courts, by OUR public agencies! Perhaps, Mr. Landstrom, you could contact Mr. Steel, Deputy County Attorney, of the Flathead County Attorneys office and determine how the Dept. of FWP could bring legal action against people who are taking away Public Access and Public Property Rights from the citizens and sportsmen of Montana.
- Point #1 says it all. If I were a landowner where a proposed site was being considered, such as proposed sites B & C, I would oppose you with anything within legal means, and if this was happening to you personally, YOU WOULD TOO.
- The only feasible and sensible access is the one adjacent to Highway 2. If Mr. Dobson is objecting maybe the state should look into how much state land adjacent to his property he has appropriated for his own use. Maybe a fence should be built along his real property line. We did not put our boat in last year as it was subject to the whims of private landowners. I would hope this project could be completed before fall of 2008.
- "Why stuff an access right next to the homes on the East side when you don't need to except to win the approval of management for keeping in the black on your budget?"
- I would strongly urge you to consider the impacts and opinions of those of us who own land on this lake and who are most impacted by your decisions.
- I believe the objectives can be achieved by working with the adjacent landowner. Their 'Life's Reward' should not be harmed by alternative B. If B is chosen, can they be moved and made whole? Some kind of settlement should be reached for the benefit of all. Access is important. Problems and delays can be avoided by working together. As sportsmen, it's the right thing to do.
- The need of the homeowners for a boat launch should not even be mentioned in your EA. How these people get their boats in the water should be of no concern to Montana's Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department.
- Land Exchange: I know the Stacy Dobson family is upset with the proposed alternatives on the East shore FWP ownership. I understand they would consider a land exchange to the West shore just south of the last private lot on the North side of FWP ownership. I would support an exchange for two reasons. The first reason is to avoid a potential long-

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term landowner conflict. The second reason would be to encourage FWP to keep the current Dobson lot to establish a headquarter facility for the Thompson Lakes. Development around the lakes will only add pressure to FWP to have a full time position located permanently in this area.

- Your EA doesn't seem to quantify the effect. For example, no matter what, a latrine will stink - but when it's placed near a home, the effect is more significant. Another example is dust from an unpaved road. All unpaved roads create dust - but when placed near homes, the effect is more significant.
- The second thing that concerns me is that the EA states that FWP does not think that the impacts on us will rise to a level of significance. I have to wonder that if you have already decided this, is there anything I can say that will change your mind? I think it is very unfair to FWP to decide what is or is not significant to me and my family. Each little incident on its own may not be significant, but as a whole, I think a public launch right next to our home will be devastating.
- I have been having a parking/access issue since my stroke in '04, PLUS, I really think this site SHOULD HAVE A PLACE FOR DISABLED PARKING....there are too many accesses that DON'T meet the needs of the handicapped.
- I prefer to use Chain of Lakes land (public) for the access site. Avoid dealing with private interests.
- It is time we get public access to this lake as we had poor access, which was behind Happy's Inn, but since this has been removed from public access then it is time for the State to provide the access to the public. This lake belongs to the people of Montana and it is time we get good access for a good boat launch.
- My wife and I are 77 and 74 years old, a ramp would be great. A boat dock would really help us get in and out of the boat.
- My wife and I are 76 and 74 years old. A ramp would be nice, but a boat dock would help us get in and out of our boat easier.
- If you believe that most boaters are aware and considerate of laws and courtesies, you are mistaken.
- Protect Turtle Cove, keep it primitive. Must everything be developed??? Have you fished Crystal Lake lately? The fishing is not that good to begin with. Please consider the need to increase fishing pressure on this lake and the expectations you will make, with the below average quality fishing experience that exists now.
- I believe the enjoyment, and frankly our property values, begins and ends with clean water.
- Turtle Cove would make a nice limited camping area. I know it is now designated for day use only, but a few overnight spots would be nice.
- No matter where the access is ultimately built, illegal or improper burning will always be a concern.
- The two ecologically important ponds seem equally important and so therefore cancel each other out. The issue should be to protect both by having the road as far away as possible.
- Cost is a consideration in all public projects, however - safety should not be compromised. As you are aware, there are always safety concerns when a public park is placed next to private property.

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- For the difference in cost between constructing the least and most expensive site locations, FWP could plant more fish, add another space or two for public use, and relocate all East shore turtles (complete with nests) to Turtle Cove.
- I feel that the money would be better spent on Horseshoe Lake improvements, which would not have an impact on Crystal Lake property owners.
- Spend your money on Horseshoe Lake, it would benefit more people and it needs it badly.
- This was covered in the late 90s by a Citizen's Oversight Committee and a contractor was selected. But then it died. I am sure someone will bring more specific facts to you on this.
- I think that public sites should adjoin state land so that we are free to enjoy the outdoors...you need a place for your belonging and to picnic and should be able to relax in the woods.
- The Turtle Bay public site should never have been closed.